

around the world suffering from poverty, hunger, or injustice. It is a voice for the most vulnerable worldwide, and this weekend Lutheran World Relief will shine a bright light on the current situation in Colombia.

For over 40 years, Colombia has been engulfed in a civil conflict pitting guerrilla groups against the Colombian Government. As a result, innocent civilians have been kidnapped and ransomed; illicit coca production and drug trafficking continue to plague the country; and thousands have died or have been forced from their homes in order to flee violence.

The United States has provided assistance to Colombia, both military and economic, in order to stem the illegal trade in drugs and promote a peaceful resolution to the civil conflict. However, Colombia remains the leading supplier of the world's cocaine, and it is home to at least three illegally armed groups that have been designated foreign terrorist organizations by the U.S. Department of State. Without question, Congress must assist countries in eradicating drug crops and combating terrorism. However, we must also remember that societies are based on the rule of law, and human rights must be respected. We should not sacrifice one goal in order to achieve another.

Lutheran churches in South Dakota around the Nation are in solidarity with peace communities in Colombia. I commend Lutheran parishioners and worshippers of other faiths, as they pray for peace and remember all those who have perished in the conflict. As a Lutheran myself, I believe protecting human rights in Colombia must remain a high priority.

RETIREMENT OF LEONIDAS RALPH MECHAM

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, today I rise to pay tribute to Leonidas Ralph Mecham, who recently retired after more than 20 years as Director of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. As that agency's longest-serving Director, Ralph ably guided the judiciary through some turbulent and challenging times, and for such he deserves the praise and commendation of this body.

Ralph Mecham was born on April 23, 1928, in Murray, UT. He earned a bachelor's degree with highest honors from the University of Utah, a law degree from George Washington University, and a master's degree in public administration from Harvard University. Ralph's first stint here in Washington began more than 50 years ago, when he served as a legislative assistant and administrative assistant to Senator Wallace Bennett of Utah, the father of our colleague Senator BOB BENNETT. Ralph returned to our State to serve as vice president of his alma mater, the University of Utah, where he also taught constitutional law and was responsible for creating the University of Utah Research Park.

Ralph could not stay away from Washington and returned to serve as Special Assistant to the Secretary of Commerce. In July 1985, Chief Justice Warren Burger appointed him Director of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. The Administrative Office provides internal administrative support to the judicial branch and communicates on behalf of the judiciary with Congress, the executive branch, and the public.

Ralph served in this capacity during a particularly challenging time for the judiciary. Providing effective judicial administration in the face of budgetary constraints is difficult when the Federal judiciary's caseload continues its upward spiral. Cases filed in the U.S. Court of Appeals, for example, more than doubled during Ralph's time as Director. The number of bankruptcy cases skyrocketed from 365,000 to over 1,780,000 in that same period. In addition, national tragedies such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, as well as catastrophes such as Hurricane Katrina, created their own unique challenges to the continued functioning of the judiciary. Ralph met each challenge effectively. His extensive background in public administration and experience in both the legislative and executive branches served him well in equipping the judicial branch for its critical tasks even through these challenges and troubled times.

Ralph also helped guide the judicial branch through a period of increased public attention and even criticism regarding judicial decisions. Protecting judicial independence while also enhancing public understanding of the function of judges in our system of government is just the kind of balancing act Ralph was prepared to tackle. He did so effectively with a steady hand.

The Director of the Administrative Office serves as secretary of the Judicial Conference and as a member of its executive committee. The judges who chaired the executive committee during Ralph's tenure also have praised his work.

The current executive committee chairman, U.S. District Judge Thomas F. Hogan, says that "[w]atching Ralph operate is like watching a master conductor guide the philharmonic orchestra through a complicated Bach symphony." If only this could be said of us Senators and our work on our committees or on this floor.

Judge Carolyn Dineen King, Chief Judge of the Fifth Circuit, chaired the executive committee from 2002 to 2005. In tackling a wide range of problems, she says, "Director Mecham exhibited his usual inventiveness, intensity, tenacity, and judgment and his remarkable ability to inspire others . . . to do the very best they were capable of."

Judge Wilfred Feinberg of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit chaired the executive committee from 1987 to 1989. He has said that "Ralph handled this difficult job with confidence, competence and dedication. It

is a testament to his hard work and dedication that today the federal courts to a large extent so successfully manage their own resources and operations."

Judge Ralph K. Winter, also a former Chief Judge of the Second Circuit, chaired the executive committee a decade later, from 1999 to 2000. He believed that Ralph showed "a remarkable capacity for keeping the long view in mind while putting out the short-term fires that would relentlessly pop up in various directions."

Perhaps the best applause for Ralph Mecham's leadership comes from Sixth Circuit Judge Gilbert Merritt, who chaired the executive committee from 1994 to 1996. "The judiciary is in much better shape administratively than it was 20 years ago." Whether in our families, our communities, or our work, we should each strive to leave those in our charge better off than we found them.

I was pleased to hear that Ralph recently received the 2006 National Public Service Award in recognition of his excellence in a half-century of public service. The award announcement noted his support for the Judicial Conference by providing high-quality services to judges and the courts, and by building relationships both inside and outside the judiciary.

Ralph Mecham has been married to the former Barbara Folsom for more than 55 years. With 5 children and 14 grandchildren, he is a devoted family man. Ralph has served in various positions in church and community, including time as a missionary in Great Britain, chairman of the Utah State Heart Association, chairman of the Salt Lake County Cancer Association, and chairman of the University of Utah National Advisory Council. His commitment to the community and to his church continues.

The judicial branch and the country are better because of Ralph's service. I want to commend him for his commitment and for setting a good example of public service. His record tells me that, even in supposed retirement, Ralph Mecham will continue helping and serving those around him.

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Ms. Evans, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The nominations received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)